

JOSEPH BEALE, SURGEON GENERAL OF THE NAVY (1873-77)

By CAPTAIN LOUIS H. RODDIS, *Medical Corps, U. S. Navy*

THE fourth to hold the office of Surgeon General of the Navy and the eighth to be Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery was Joseph Beale, born on December 30, 1814. He was a native of Pennsylvania and appointed from that State as an Assistant Surgeon in the Navy on September 6, 1873. His first sea duty was on the old sailing sloop *John Adams* on which he served in the East India Squadron as it was then called, from 1839 to 1841. After service in the Home Squadron and the Naval Hospital, New York, he was again on the *U.S.S. John Adams*, this time on the coast of Africa engaged in the prevention of the slave trade. In 1848 he was commissioned as a Surgeon, on April 19, the anniversary day of Lexington.

During the Civil War he was on the steam sloop *Susquehanna* in the West Gulf Blockading Squadron from 1861 to 1863. He thus participated in the attack on Forts Jackson and Phillip and the capture of New Orleans by Farragut. He was on duty at the Naval Hospital, Chelsea, Massachusetts, from 1863 to 1865, and after the war, Fleet Surgeon of the Asiatic Squadron. He was serving as president of the board of medical examiners when appointed Chief of the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery by President Grant in 1873. He was appointed on July 9, 1873 and served until February 2, 1877.

In Surgeon General Beale's administration, the naval hospital at Pensacola, the construction of which was recommended by his predecessor, was built, or more properly, rebuilt. It had been a place of importance during the Civil



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War and was used by Farragut for the sick and wounded of the Gulf Squadron. Following the war, it was allowed to fall into decay. The need for it was felt, however, as the result of a yellow fever outbreak in 1874 which cost many lives including two medical officers, Surgeon John B. Ackley and Acting Passed Assistant George B. Todd. The Surgeon General says that, "They fell in the heroic discharge of duty, leaving

behind them an example that sheds luster on the branch of service to which they belonged."

The size and constitution of the medical Corps in Beale's time, approximately 10 years after the Civil War and 10 years before the beginning of the steel Navy, is of interest. The number and distribution of medical officers in various ranks were:

| | |
|---|-----|
| Medical directors | 15 |
| Medical inspectors | 15 |
| Surgeons | 50 |
| Passed assistant surgeons | 32 |
| Assistant surgeons with rank of master ... | 21 |
| Assistant surgeons with rank of ensign | 23 |
| <hr/> | |
| Total | 156 |

Of equal interest is the bird's-eye view of the amounts of the various appropriations between 1872 and 1878. In these days when the expenditures to operate the Medical Department of the Navy run into millions, the modest figures of those horse and buggy days

The project of establishing, on a very moderate scale, a school for the instruction of assistant surgeons in certain practical branches of their profession, was presented in my annual reports of 1873 and 1874. The views then expressed of the benefits it would confer on the younger members of the corps, having been strengthened by further reflection, the subject is again commended to your favorable consideration.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. BAILE,
Surgeon General United States Navy
Hon. Geo. M. Robeson,
Secretary of the Navy

In 1872 Medical Inspector Edward Shippen, then fleet surgeon on the European station had made a careful study and a most comprehensive report to Surgeon General Palmer on the naval medical school at Netley, England, which had been established the year before. Shippen's account of this school of naval medicine was un-

| | Appropriation Estimates | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 1872-73 | 1873-74 | 1874-75 | 1875-76 | 1876-77 | 1877-78 |
| Surgeons' necessities and appliances.... | \$40,000 | 40,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 30,000 | 40,000 |
| Repairs and improvements of naval hospitals..... | 25,000 | 25,000 | 5,000 | 20,000 | 10,000 | 40,000 |
| Contingent..... | 25,000 | 25,000 | 25,000 | 25,000 | 15,000 | 25,000 |
| Civil Establishment..... | 73,372 | 75,204 | 35,000 | 35,000 | 25,000 | 45,922 |
| Total..... | 163,372 | 165,204 | 95,000 | 110,000 | 80,000 | 150,922 |

of the Republic seem like mere pocket money.

The following shows that the prospect of establishing a naval medical school was one which this as well as other Surgeons General before and after him did not give up hopes of completing:

doubtedly used as the basis for the estimate and plans of our naval medical school.

We have a glimpse of the old navy when on April 18, 1875 a circular was issued by the Secretary of the Navy giving the instructions regarding the enlisting of boys of 16 to 18 years of

age to serve until their majority. This had been authorized by recent act of Congress. The minimum height for 16 years was 5 feet 1 inch without shoes, and the minimum chest measurement was 30 inches. The rate of pay was \$10.50 a month and one ration. They were allowed \$1.00 a month spending money "if they are out of debt" and "will be allowed liberty to go on shore, at the discretion of the commanding officer. The flagship *Minnesota* is designated for this training."

Beale at the beginning of his administration published a volume of "Sanitary and Medical Reports," another volume was published later but no other, as the material was gradually merged into the annual report of the Surgeon General.

There was one most interesting report mentioned by him as well as other Chiefs of Bureau about this time. This was the Medical and Surgical History of the Navy for the period of the Civil War and which he says, "was a modest effort to do for the Navy what the Medical and Surgical History of the Rebellion, published under the auspices of the War Department, has done for the Army, and though not intended to vie with that unrivaled publication, will be a work of like scope and comprehensiveness." He speaks of the work as rapidly nearing completion in the previous year. This material was never printed due no doubt to "lack of funds." There are two mysteries connected with this work, first as to its author and second as to the whereabouts of the manuscript. There is no

question but that it contained valuable historical material on naval medicine during the Civil War and that it was not published is to be deplored as it is now apparently lost. Considerable effort has been expended in endeavoring to discover who was the author of that work and also to locate the manuscript but without success. It seems likely that Dr. Horwitz may have done much of the work, both when Assistant Chief of Bureau and later as Surgeon General. Dr. Jerome Kidder, and also Dr. Edward Shippen are possible authors. The manuscript itself has completely disappeared though it may be in existence in some attic or box of old papers.

Surgeon General Beale had as his Assistant Chiefs of Bureau first, Surgeon R. C. Dean, then Surgeon H. C. Nelson, and finally Surgeon J. B. Parker. His entire tour of office was served under President Grant. The more one examines Dr. Beale's administration, the more one is convinced that he deserves to rank as one of the outstanding figures of the office of Surgeon General and should be placed with Harris, Tryon, and Rixey as a far-sighted and successful administrator.

At the termination of his tour of duty as Surgeon General, Dr. Beale went to the retired list, being sixty-two years of age. His death occurred at Philadelphia September 23, 1889.

His portrait shows a rather square type of face. The forehead is good; the eyes deep set. He wore whiskers of the sort known as "burnsides" named from the well-known Civil War general who first made them popular.